



# WESTERN CAUCUS NEWS

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Contact: Cody Stewart  
(202) 226-5793

## **BIPARTISAN GROUP OF LAWMAKERS APPLAUDS HISTORIC INCREASE IN PILT**

Washington D.C. – The U.S. House of Representatives today historically approved \$242 million to fund the payments in lieu of taxes program (PILT) program through which the Interior Department gives payments to counties to make up for property taxes they can't collect on federal lands that are located within their boundaries.

The passage of the bipartisan Cubin/Rahall/Cannon/Udall amendment provides approximately 80 percent of the authorized level for PILT by redirecting funds from Interior Department overhead. The increase in funds will help counties across the country pay for essential services such as environmental compliance, law enforcement, health care, education, firefighting and search and rescue. For more than 25 years, the PILT program has provided funding to more than 1,900 counties in 49 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Rep. Barbara Cubin (WY-At large) said, "Shortchanging local communities by under-funding PILT is simply bad policy. Common sense dictates that fulfilling our obligations to local communities should take precedence over beefing up the Department of the Interior's staff salaries and expense accounts. When Congress shortchanges the PILT program, rural counties are the ones who end up paying the piper."

Rep. Chris Cannon (UT-03), Chairman of the Congressional Western Caucus said "For years, communities across the nation have been short-changed by under-funding PILT. Today's increase will provide an economic boost for vital community services and will bring an additional \$1 million to the counties throughout Utah. With today's vote, we've taken major steps to finally fully funding PILT to its authorized level."

Rep. C.L. "Butch" Otter (ID-01) said, "The PILT program has been funded at an annual average of \$155 million for the past 10 years, while federal land acquisition funding has averaged more than \$347 million a year during the same period. It's bad public policy to keep buying land when we can't make good on our commitments to the land we already have. This is a great step in the right direction, and I'm encouraged that counties like those in Idaho -- where almost two thirds of the land is in federal hands -- may one day finally get their due."

"It's nice to see the East gradually understanding what the West has known all along – that fully funding PILT is a national issue. If the Federal Government is going to hold onto these large tracts of land in our states, our counties that are impacted must receive some degree of financial restitution. I applaud the entire Western Caucus for this victory today." Said Rep. Rob Bishop (UT-01)

Rep. Stevan Pearce (NM-02) said, "This amendment is an historic vote to increase PILT. Although PILT funding is not fully funded, the amendment gives our counties the largest ever amount of PILT funding. These funds are vital for counties to pay for schools, roads, emergency and other necessary services. It also recognizes the economic constraints placed on counties that have large amounts of federal land ownership. It's time the federal government accept the responsibility they have to counties and fulfill the promise made under PILT."

"The bottom line is that the federal government owns too much land in the West," said Jeff Flake (AZ-06)

*The Western Caucus is a group of 60 members of Congress committed to protecting the interests and ideals of the West.*

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